

USACHPPM
HEALTH INFORMATION OPERATIONS (HIO) UPDATE

7 January 2005

The HIO Update provides information regarding global medical and veterinary issues of interest to the United States (US) Army. The update does not attempt to analyze the information as to its strategic or tactical impact on the US Army and should not be regarded as a medical intelligence product. Medical intelligence products are available from the [Armed Forces Medical Intelligence Center](#). The information in the HIO Update should provide an increased awareness of current and emerging health-related issues.

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HOT TOPICS

Indian Ocean Earthquake & Tsunami Emergency Update

5 January – The Pacific Disaster Management Information Network reported that search and rescue operations for last month’s (December 26) massive tsunamis are largely over. The tsunamis were triggered by an undersea earthquake measuring 9.0 on the Richter scale off the west coast of Indonesia’s northern Sumatra Island and killed more than 150,000 people along the coastal areas of some 11 countries in the Indian Ocean. The focus of attention is now quickly shifting to relief and recovery efforts. Tsunami-related deaths have been reported in Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, Maldives, Bangladesh, Somalia, Tanzania and Kenya. The loss of life has been particularly severe in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand. According to the Indonesian Health Ministry, the death toll has now climbed to over 94,081, with the possibility of 100,000 or even more in the northern province of Aceh on the island of Sumatra and along the 115 miles of the islands along Indonesia’s northwestern coast, which is close to the epicenter of the earthquake. WHO estimates 80 percent of Aceh’s west coast has been damaged. The death toll in Sri Lanka and India has also climbed to in excess of 30,000 and 9,400 deaths respectively. India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as the southern state of Tamil Nadu, have been the worst hit areas. The death toll in Thailand’s resort islands of Phuket and Phi Phi has now climbed to over 5,000, including some 2,500 foreigners from at least 36 countries. More than 400 combined deaths have also been reported in Malaysia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Maldives, Somalia, Tanzania and Kenya. UNICEF officials say the health situation in India’s worst-hit district of Nagapattinam in the southern state of Tamil Nadu is “decent.” An adequate supply of clean drinking water has prevented the outbreak of an epidemic. [View Article](#) (see more articles under PACOM)

Odds of Avian Flu Outbreak Researched

3 January – The London Free Press reported that U.S. scientists soon will begin experiments to learn more about why a virus that nature designed to infect migratory water birds is able to kill mammal species ranging from house cats to tigers to humans. The researchers, from the influenza branch of the Centers for Disease Control, will mate [H5N1](#) and [human flu](#) viruses in a process known as reassortment. Viable offspring will be tested in animals thought to be good surrogates for humans, to see if the viruses can infect, can be transmitted easily from infected animals to healthy ones and to note the severity of disease each provokes. In other words, researchers will be engineering viruses of pandemic potential. It’s high-risk but crucial work, the influenza community insists. The World Health Organization has been pleading for months for qualified research facilities -- of which there are few --

to undertake this work. The Geneva-based agency would like to be able to put odds on how likely H5N1 is to become a pandemic strain and how deadly -- or not -- H5N1 reassortment viruses might be in humans. [View Article](#)

Painkillers Damage Intestine

3 January - Reuters reported that more than 70 percent of patients who took painkillers such as ibuprofen for more than three months suffered damage to their small intestines. The study is yet another blow to patients trying to find ways to treat arthritis pain, after reports that the most advanced drugs, called COX-2 inhibitors, can raise the risk of heart death. Dr. David Y. Graham of the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston and colleagues studied 21 patients taking a range of drugs called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, or NSAIDs. They compared them to 20 patients taking either acetaminophen, an unrelated painkiller, or nothing. "Small-bowel injury was seen in 71 percent of NSAID users compared with 10 percent of controls," they found. "We have always known that NSAIDs can cause potentially deadly stomach complications, but the extent of the impact on the small intestine was largely unknown until now," Graham added. [View Article](#)

Scientists Say Fast Food Heightens Risk of Diabetes

3 January – VOA News reported that a new study has found that people who eat fast food are much more likely to develop [insulin resistance](#) than those who don't. A study found that people whose diet consists primarily of fatty food - such as hamburgers, french fries and pizza - weigh more and have an increased risk of insulin resistance compared to people who limit their consumption of foods high in fat. Insulin resistance is a condition in which peoples' insulin does not process food effectively and abnormal amounts of sugar circulate in the blood stream. The result is high blood sugar levels that can make such individuals more prone to high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. Investigators followed more than three thousand people who reported their fast food eating habits. After 15 years, the U.S. researchers found that those who ate at least two meals per week at a fast food restaurant were four-point-five kilograms heavier, and they had more than a 100 percent risk of insulin resistance compared to those who limited their intake of fast food to one meal or less per week. [View Article](#)

Smoking Makes the Campus Scene

29 December - USA TODAY reported that college students have been flocking to bars, nightclubs and campus parties for [tobacco](#)-industry-sponsored parties, complete with complimentary cigarettes. A new study suggests these parties are a powerful marketing tool that encourages some to start smoking. Nearly one in 10 college students have gone to an industry-sponsored party. Students at all but one of 119 colleges surveyed have attended the parties. At some schools, 27% of students have attended tobacco bashes, which often include live music and freebies such as T-shirts. Students who did not smoke before college were almost twice as likely to start if they attended industry-backed parties that included free cigarettes. Tobacco companies agreed not to market to anyone under 18 as part of the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with 46 state attorneys general. Tobacco companies have since shifted their marketing efforts toward brand-centered social events. [View Article](#)

Urinary Tract Infections Caused by Tainted Food of Animal Origin

4 January – Medical News Today reported that a multi-state outbreak of [urinary tract infections](#) (UTI) caused by drug-resistant *E. coli* was probably due to consumption of a contaminated food product of animal origin, such as meat or milk. UTIs are one of the most common infections in women. Although they are not typically considered "outbreak" diseases, it is likely that a cluster of UTIs resulting from

the same drug-resistant strain of the bacterium *E. coli* came from a single source, such as a food animal. Between October 1999 and January 2000, a single strain of *E. coli* was discovered to be responsible for drug-resistant UTIs in university communities in California, Minnesota, and Michigan. Researchers studied nearly 500 specimens of *E. coli* obtained from non-human sources and found that one-quarter of the specimens were microbiologically indistinguishable from comparable human strains of *E. coli*. A more refined test showed that, of the drug-resistant specimens, one from a cow had a 94 percent similarity to a UTI-causing human strain of *E. coli*. The researchers concluded that the cause of the outbreak was probably foodborne. [View Article](#)

West Nile Vaccine Produces Immunity in Mice

29 December - Reuters Health reported that mice injected with a purified structural protein from the [West Nile virus](#) (WNV) develop immunity against infection. The findings suggest WNV-like particles could be used as a vaccine, Dr. T. Jake Liang of the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, and colleagues report. Because the particles are produced using genetic engineering techniques, they avoid the risks of some other WNV vaccine candidates. "There's really no infectious virus in there; you can really control very easily in terms of quality and purity," Liang told Reuters Health. "We can certainly scale up and make large quantities of it." The next steps in the research will be to test the vaccine in monkeys, and with good results trials in humans can follow, Liang said. [View Article](#)

Focus on Epidemiology

Recovery of a Patient from Clinical Rabies --- Wisconsin, 2004

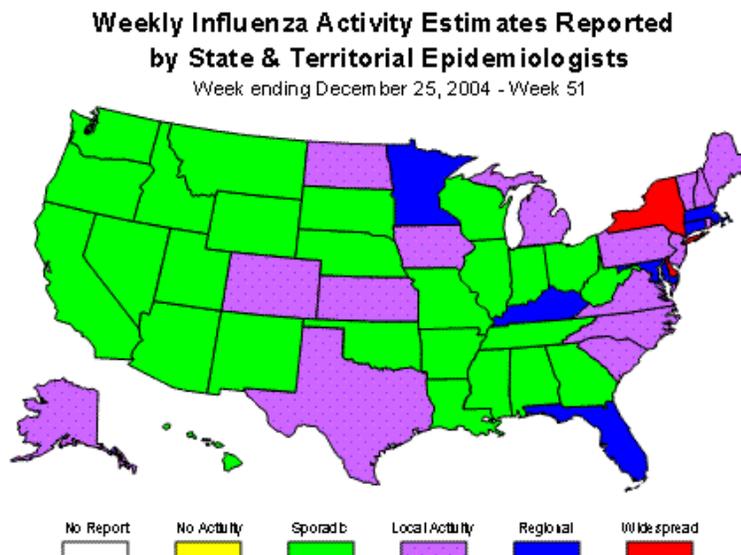
24 December – MMWR reported that in October 2004, a previously healthy female aged 15 years in Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, received a diagnosis of [rabies](#) after being bitten by a bat approximately 1 month before symptom onset. This is the first documented recovery from clinical rabies by a patient who had not received either pre- or postexposure prophylaxis for rabies. Rabies is a viral infection of the central nervous system and is nearly always fatal without proper postexposure prophylaxis (PEP). In September, the girl picked up a bat and was bitten on her left index finger. Approximately 1 month after the bat bite, the girl complained of fatigue and tingling and numbness of the left hand. These symptoms persisted, and 2 days later she felt unsteady and developed diplopia. On the third day of illness, she still had diplopia, an onset of nausea and vomiting, as well as partial bilateral sixth-nerve palsy. On the fourth day of illness, the patient's symptoms continued, and she was admitted to a local hospital. On admission, she was afebrile, alert, and able to follow commands. She had partial sixth-nerve palsy, blurred vision, and unsteady gait. During the next 36 hours, she had slurred speech, nystagmus, tremors of the left arm, increased lethargy, and a temperature of 102°F. On the sixth day of illness, the bat-bite history was reported. The patient was transferred to a tertiary care hospital. On arrival, the patient had a temperature of 100.9°F, impaired muscular coordination, difficulty speaking, double vision, muscular twitching, and tremors in the left arm. She was somewhat obtunded but answered questions appropriately and complied with commands. Rabies-virus--specific antibodies were detected in the patient's serum and CSF. Clinical management of the patient consisted of supportive care and neuroprotective measures, including a drug-induced coma and ventilator support. Intravenous ribavirin was used under an investigational protocol. The patient was kept comatose for 7 days; during that period, results from lumbar puncture indicated an increase in antirabies IgG by immunofluorescent assay from 1:32 to 1:2,048. Her coma medications were tapered, and the patient became increasingly alert. On the 33rd day of illness, she was extubated; 3 days later she was transferred to a rehabilitation unit. At the time of transfer, she was unable to speak

after prolonged intubation. As of December 17, the patient remained hospitalized with steady improvement. She was able to walk with assistance, ride a stationary cycle for 8 minutes, and feed herself a soft, solid diet. She solved math puzzles, used sign language, and was regaining the ability to speak. The prognosis for her full recovery is unknown. [View Study](#)

Influenza Update

[CDC Weekly Influenza Report for Week Ending 25 December – Week 51](#)

From December 19-25, 2004, influenza activity continued to increase mostly in the eastern United States.

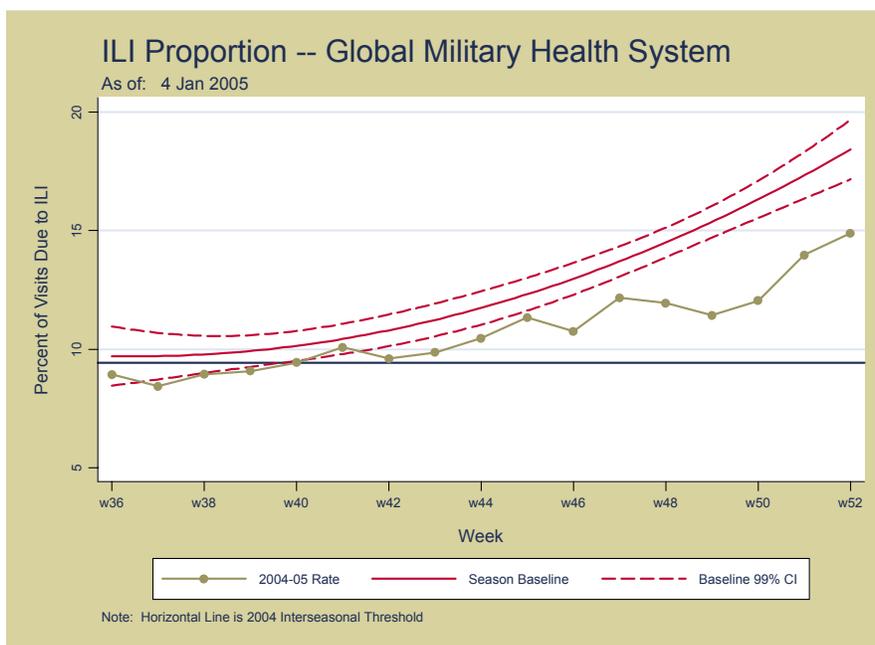


[European Influenza Surveillance Scheme Report for Week Ending 26 December - Week 52](#)

The intensity of clinical influenza activity remains low (at baseline levels) in Europe, except in Spain where the intensity of activity is at a medium level. Most networks reported geographically sporadic activity (14/19) while local activity was reported by France and Spain and no activity by Poland, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. With 88% of total detections influenza A virus is the dominant virus in Europe so far this season.

[DOD Worldwide Influenza Surveillance Program for Week Ending 18 December – Week 52](#)

Influenza-Like Illness - This graph plots the percentage of weekly outpatient visits at military installations that had an ICD-9 code correlating with Influenza-Like Illness as defined by [ESSENCE](#). Since 3 October 2004, the Epidemiological Surveillance Division (AFIOH/SDE) has processed 615 specimens as part of the influenza surveillance program. Of those specimens, 45 (7%) were positive for influenza A and 6 (1%) were positive for influenza B. In addition, 60 specimens are still being processed.



Other timely information can be found in:

The current issue of the Army Medical Surveillance Activity's [Medical Surveillance Monthly Report](#)
 This week's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report](#)

USCENTCOM

Somalia: Fears of Water-Borne Diseases in Areas Affected By Tsunami

5 January – All Africa reported that the Indian Ocean tsunami that slammed onto the Somali coast 10 days ago destroyed water sources and sanitation facilities on Hafun peninsula, putting up to 1,000 households at risk of [water-borne diseases](#), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said. "UNICEF is positioning antibiotics, ORS [oral rehydration salts] and chlorination packages in Hafun out of concern that water-borne diseases could break out," Bob McCarthy, UNICEF Somalia emergency officer said. The agency said about 2,000 children had been affected in Hafun alone. "We want to do everything possible to ensure that their education is not disrupted," McCarthy added. He added: "The people in Hafun were caught off guard. We are also looking at those who were stressed and feel it is still unsafe to return to their homes along the seafont." UNICEF said it was mounting a rapid relief effort targeting about 15,000 affected people, especially in Hafun where 80 percent of the homes were destroyed. [View Article](#)

UN Fears New Polio Outbreak in Sudan

3 January – Turkish Press.com reported that the World Health Organization expressed fear of a fresh outbreak of [polio](#) in Sudan, saying 105 cases have already been reported in various parts of the country. The organization's advisor on vaccination said that 40 cases were reported in the capital and 21 in Port Sudan on the Red Sea coast. He also said the WHO would launch a three-day vaccination campaign between January 10 and 12, as part of an effort to contain the epidemic before it claims more victims. United Nations special envoy to Sudan, Jan Pronk, appealed to the warring parties in

the stricken Darfur region to adhere to a truce they signed and allow health workers carry out immunizations. Sudan was on the verge of being declared a polio-free country as no cases were reported between 2001 and 2004 but that changed after a case was reported in May 2004. [View Article](#)

USEUCOM

European Union: Animal Diseases – 2004

4 January – ProMED reported the following notifiable animal diseases in 32 countries:

Disease/total outbreaks/affected countries (annual outbreaks, month of last confirmation).

African swine fever/241/Italy (241, Dec).

Bluetongue/531/Cyprus(1, Mar);Spain(304, Dec);France(34, Dec);Italy(183, Oct);Portugal(9, Dec).

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy/863/Belgium (11, Dec); Czech Rep (7, Oct); Germany (64, Dec); Denmark (1, May); Spain (125, Nov); France (49, Oct); UK (362, Dec); Ireland (124, Dec); Italy (6, Aug); Netherlands (6, Dec); Poland (11, Nov); Portugal (86, Dec); Slovenia(1, Mar); Slovakia (7, Oct); Switzerland (3, Dec).

Classical swine fever (domestic swine)/5/Slovakia (5, Aug).

Classical swine fever (feral pigs)/7/Germany (3, Nov); France (1, Oct); Slovakia (3, Aug).

Equine encephalomyelitis (of all types)/32/France (32, Nov). [These might refer to equine West Nile virus cases in Camargue]

Equine infectious anaemia/3/Italy (3, Nov).

Infectious haematopoietic necrosis/7/Germany (1, Mar); France (6, Jul).

Infectious salmon anaemia/15/Norway (15, Dec).

Newcastle disease/4/Bulgaria (1, Dec); Finland (1, Jul); Sweden (2, Jul).

Swine vesicular disease/124/Italy (123, Dec); Portugal (1, Jan).

Viral hemorrhagic septicaemia/11/Austria (1, Apr); Czech Rep (1, Jun); Italy (11, Dec). [View Article](#)

Flu Vaccine Supplier in Danger of Losing Plant's U.S. License

29 December – The Kansas City Star reported that the owners of a Liverpool, England, [flu vaccine](#) plant are trying to convince U.S. regulators they can reduce contamination in time to produce doses for next year. Failure to do so could mean the loss of the plant's U.S. license, according to the Food and Drug Administration. Officials at Chiron Corp., the plant's U.S. owner, have said they have every intention of providing their Fluvirin vaccine in the United States next year, but several experts doubt the plant can get a handle on its contamination problems in time. Chiron has begun comprehensive efforts to fix the contamination problem, and FDA and British regulators are working with the company to make sure it succeeds, said an FDA spokesman who asked not to be identified because of agency policy on the vaccine issue. The primary issue was the failure to follow what the FDA calls current Good Manufacturing Practices. Under the FDA's regulatory scheme, the plant is required to set and meet its own internal standards for allowable contamination throughout the production process. [View Article](#)

Russia: Outbreak of Hepatitis A in Murmansk Region

31 December – ProMED reported that the city of Apatit in the Murmansk region is experiencing a serious outbreak of [hepatitis A](#). The first patients were admitted to the hospital 2 months ago. At the present time, 130 people Apatit have been diagnosed with hepatitis A. The number is increasing day by day, and many children are among the infected. Although physicians regard water as the source of

the outbreak, infection is spreading geometrically by contact. Officials allocated 4.5 million rubles [USD 162,000] for urgent vaccination of the population. [View Article](#)

Scotland: Hospitals on Alert amid Fears of New Superbug Outbreak

2 January – The Sunday Times reported that every Scottish hospital is on alert for a new superbug that is resistant to normal antibiotics. Currently only half of all hospitals are monitoring the deadly strain of bacteria, which is responsible for dozens of deaths across Britain each year. Every hospital laboratory in Scotland will be required to report all infections involving [extended spectrum beta lactamase-producing \(ESBL\) coliforms](#). They will also be issued an action plan to deal with outbreaks, including the isolation of infected patients and the introduction of disinfection procedures to halt the superbug's spread. In Scotland, the number of confirmed ESBL infections has risen almost tenfold since 1999. ESBLs are mutated bacteria that are found in the gut. They produce enzymes that break down antibiotics and pose the greatest risk to patients with weak immune systems. Like MRSA, they can kill by causing blood poisoning and can only be destroyed using special antibiotics that are reserved for serious infections. [View Article](#)

The Flu Has Arrived; 100,000 Cases in Italy

3 January – AGI Online reported that, "The flu has arrived", according to Fabrizio Pregliasco, who is in charge of the laboratory for [influenza](#) of the Institute of Virology of the State University of Milan. "We are in the first stage", Pregliasco said, "and so far about 100,000 cases of flu and 400,000 of syndromes similar to flu have been reported in Italy". Dr Pregliasco said that forecasts are being confirmed and the epidemic "should not be particularly strong and the cases should reach 2.5 million in the next 6 weeks". The beginning of the school winter season will be crucial: "A remarkable increase will be recorded because 40 percent of all the cases are children aged between 0 and 4 years". [View Article](#)

USNORTHCOM

Americans Help Rebuild Iraq's Medical Libraries

3 January – The Boston Globe reported that Dr. Alex Garza, an Army Reserve captain and emergency room doctor from Missouri, saw firsthand how hopelessly outdated Iraq's medical libraries was. Back in the United States, Dr. David Gifford, a retired Army colonel, learned of the problem from a physician friend stationed in Iraq. Unbeknownst to each other, the two men thought of a plan: to modernize Iraq's health care system by getting up-to-date medical textbooks and journals into the hands of Iraqi professors and students. Garza and Gifford eventually joined forces, and soon medical schools, publishing houses and people around the globe donated box loads of medical literature to the war-scarred country. More than 100,000 items have been collected so far. Most of Iraq's medical books were at least two decades old and several editions out of date. The more recent ones were photocopies of medical textbooks housed at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad. Topics such as AIDS and the latest surgical techniques were wholly absent from the editions Iraqis medical students were using, Garza said. [View Article](#)

Canada: BSE, Bovine

2 January – ProMED reported that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) confirmed that an older dairy cow from Alberta has tested positive for [bovine spongiform encephalopathy](#) (BSE). The

infected animal was born in 1996, prior to the introduction of the 1997 feed ban. It is suspected that the animal became infected by contaminated feed before the feed ban. No part of the animal entered the human food or animal feed systems. This finding does not indicate an increased risk to food safety. Confirming BSE in this animal is not unexpected. Canada has in place a suite of risk mitigation measures to protect public and animal health, including the removal of SRM from the human food chain, the ruminant to ruminant feed ban, the national surveillance program, and import restrictions. As a result, the U.S. continues to consider Canada as a minimal risk region. As stated in the U.S. Department of Agriculture press release of 30 Dec 2004, the U.S. would not alter the implementation of its rule to resume trade with Canada. [View Article](#)

Illness Taking Grim Toll at Nation's Boot Camps

31 December - The Seattle Times reported that at least 1 in 9 recruits are treated for acute pneumonia, adenovirus or other respiratory diseases during their short but intense training stints. Infection rates at boot camps have risen each of the past five years. Up to 3,000 recruits each month are treated for acute respiratory illnesses, which flourish in overcrowded barracks where beds are stacked head-to-toe with stressed and fatigued troops. For a quarter of a century, the Pentagon controlled [adenovirus](#) by inoculating each service member with a vaccine it developed and owned. But the Defense Department abandoned the vaccine in 1996 as too expensive. The military admits its blunder and is racing to create a new vaccine, possibly by 2006. At least six recruits have died from the virus since 2000. More than 100,000 recruits will enter the nation's eight largest training centers this year. On average, 10 recruits die each year from disease or accident. Dr. William Winkenwerder Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, acknowledged the infection problems in training facilities. He said he is trying to increase hygiene at boot camps, where scores of recruits may share a single sink and are given no time to even wash their hands during their regimented days. Winkenwerder is also exploring the alternative use of antibiotics while waiting for the new vaccine. [View Article](#)

Restrictions on Flu Vaccinations Eased; Supply Low

5 January – Philly Burbs reported that health-care providers can now give [flu vaccinations](#) to anyone who wants one, as long as they've treated all senior citizens and other high-risk patients on waiting lists, the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Senior Services announced yesterday. Dr. Eddy Bresnitz, state epidemiologist, said he knew of only 9,000 doses of unused vaccine statewide. The Burlington County Health Department and Moorestown Visiting Nurse Association said all their doses have been allotted to high-risk residents. "The providers with excess vaccine that have no high-risk individuals on the list can offer it to low-priority individuals," Bresnitz said during a conference call with reporters. "There is not a lot of vaccine available around the state for low-risk, and you can't order it." [View Article](#)

USPACOM

Avian Influenza in Viet Nam

30 December – The WHO has received informal reports of a laboratory-confirmed case of [H5N1 infection](#) in Viet Nam. The patient, who has been hospitalized since 26 December, is a 16-year-old girl who fell ill in the southern province of Tay Ninh. Vietnamese authorities are investigating the source of her infection, including the possibility of contact with infected poultry. This is the first human case of H5N1 detected in Viet Nam since early September. It coincides with several fresh poultry outbreaks

reported in southern provinces in December. Recent poultry outbreaks in Tay Ninh Province have not been reported. As avian influenza viruses become more active at cooler temperatures, further poultry outbreaks, possibly accompanied by sporadic human cases, can be anticipated. [View Article](#)

Body Burners Scour Sri Lanka's Tsunami Wasteland

5 January – AlertNet reported that the four men pressed dirty rags to their mouths as they toppled a decomposed corpse off a mat onto a smoldering bonfire. Flames licked around the woman's body. One man retched at the stench. The other three got straight back to clearing debris. With Sri Lankans desperate to make a living after the tsunami, some have turned body burning into a profession. "It has cost 5,000 rupees (about \$50) for three bodies," says S. Manivannan, watching from the other side of the pyre. Manivannan has come to help an uncle clear his home of splintered wood, brick and sludge, brought by the giant waves that hit Sri Lanka on Dec. 26. But he stands well back from the decayed corpse. No one knows how many bodies lie buried under slabs of brick and concrete on the east coast -- the worst hit by the giant waves that killed more than 30,000 people in Sri Lanka alone. When the dead are found, no one waits to find out their names. Piles of ashes litter the sand. Columns of smoke rise into the air. Three corpses were heaped onto burning wood stacks outside the home of Manivannan's uncle, Ponaiah Jawbaratnam. But Jawbaratnam said no members of his family had died. The tsunami waves washed bodies from one home to another. [View Article](#)

China Rings Alarm over Possible Flu Pandemic

30 December – The China Daily reported that China has increased measures to guard against a [flu](#) pandemic this winter-spring period in response to the World Health Organization (WHO) warning that an outbreak is long overdue. Dr. David Ho, an expert on AIDS and epidemics, warned that a new round of flu triggered by a new virus strain is expected to break out from southeast Asia or China. Large cities have stepped up surveillance measures on flu. Guangzhou, capital of south China's Guangdong Province neighboring Hong Kong, has built up 19 surveillance sites at hospitals. The Hong Kong SAR government proposed to the Legislative Council Panel on Health Services ordering 1.1 million antiviral doses in advance of the peak winter influenza season. The Chinese Academy of Engineering recently urged the public to receive flu vaccinations. So far, however, less than one percent of Chinese have received flu vaccination. [View Article](#)

Disease Emerges in Wake of Tsunami

4 January – Reuters reported that hungry and filthy, thousands of Indonesians queued for water on Tuesday as aid deliveries to tsunami-ravaged Aceh province hit new snags and cases of disease and infection among survivors emerged. The World Health Organization (WHO) said cases of [pneumonia](#), [diarrhea](#), [malaria](#) and [skin infections](#) were appearing, along with some cases of [gangrene](#), because survivors had been exposed to polluted water and not treated carefully enough. [View Article](#)

Experts Dismiss HK Government Fears of Post-Tsunami Fish

5 January – Reuters reported that Hong Kong's health authorities asked seafood traders to temporarily suspend imports of seafood from South Asian countries, saying fish may have ingested [heavy metals](#) churned up from the seabed by the seismic movements on 26 Dec. Food and Environmental Hygiene Department assistant director Thomas Chung also told a radio program that eating tainted fish would affect human health although consuming small quantities would have limited impact. But experts have brushed off these fears. "This is only a one-off incident and has very little impact on human health," said Lo Wing-lok, a Hong Kong doctor with Oxfam. "Besides, fishermen there won't be able to go out and catch fish for exports." Others questioned the logic behind the move,

saying fish could be contaminated with heavy metals only over a long period of time. "Heavy metals only accumulate over a long period of time. It can't be a short-term effect," said Clarus Chu, a marine conservation officer at the World Wildlife Fund in Hong Kong. [View Article](#)

First Disease Outbreaks Reported

2 January – ProMED reported that the first outbreaks of communicable diseases were now being seen in areas hit by the 26 Dec 2004 killer waves in Asia, a senior WHO official said. "There are increasing reports of [diarrheal](#) disease outbreaks coming from displaced persons' settlements in Sri Lanka, in India," said David Nabarro, the top official at the WHO dealing with humanitarian crises. However he said the initial signs were not cause for alarm, although preventive measures and treatments must continue. [View Article](#)

Handling Bodies after Disasters: New Book Offers Guidelines

4 January - The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has published a new manual that dispels myths about the handling and the effects of mass casualties following a natural disaster, such as the 26 December earthquake and tsunami in South Asia. The book, *Management of Dead Bodies in Disaster Situations*, provides the technical information needed to support relief workers in the proper management of dead bodies, based on the following principles: 1) When a death is the result of a disaster, the body does not pose a major public health risk for the spread of infection. 2) Victims should not be buried in common graves. 3) Mass cremation of bodies should not take place when this goes against the cultural and religious norms of the population. 4) Every effort should be made to identify bodies, and—as a last resort—unidentified corpses should be buried in such a way as to permit later identification or exhumation. This is a basic human right of surviving family members. [View Article](#)

Indonesia Hit by Tetanus Outbreak

5 January – [Iafrica.com](#) reported that a [tetanus](#) outbreak is killing Indonesians who survived last week's tsunamis as many had not been immunized against the potentially fatal infection. "There is a full-blown outbreak and people have started to die," said Global Relief spokesperson Murray Louw in a statement. The organization said 12 of their volunteers were in Banda Aceh. Louw said tetanus can infect even minor cuts and scratches. The incubation period can range from a day to several months with the average being eight days. [View Article](#)

Kala-azar Infection Rate Increasing in Bangladesh

29 December – The Asia-Pacific Disease Outbreak /Surveillance Report stated that people in 34 districts are at high risk of Kala-azar ([leishmaniasis](#)) infection, an endemic sand fly-borne disease that is a major health problem in Bangladesh. About 80% of patients die within five years of infection and the infection rate is increasing. People living in and near the Padma, Jamuna and Brahmaputra basins are the most vulnerable. Kala-azar is caused by the parasite 'Leishmania donovani'. The parasite is transmitted by female sand flies and human to human transmission occurs rarely through blood transfusion, sexual contact and via nasal mucus. The incubation period is generally 2-6 months. Thousands of people suffer from it every year and most go undiagnosed and untreated. Although Kala-azar is curable, most patients fail to follow the long treatment regime due to poverty and unavailability of near-by treatment facilities. Untreated, Kala-azar can be fatal. [View Article](#)

Monitoring Aid Workers for Avian Influenza

29 December – ProMED reported that the disaster affecting southeast Asia will create a number of public health challenges. However, there is the possibility that these events may lead to an even larger [pandemic influenza](#) problem. The relief effort has brought a number of people from around the globe to a region not only affected by the tsunami but also affected by avian influenza. With the influx of immune-naive foreign aid workers, there is a potential for spread to these people who may be more susceptible. The hygienic conditions in the area are going to be lacking for some time. In addition, many of these workers might almost suspect that they will come down with an illness because of the circumstances, and may simply shrug off the symptoms. As they return to their countries of origin, they may unwittingly act as the index cases of pandemic flu in their countries. [View Article](#)

South Asia Tsunami Situation Report 6

3 January – The World Health Organization reported that providing safe drinking water and adequate sanitation remains the major priority in preventing disease outbreaks. Reported diarrhea is being examined, so far ruling out cholera. Clean up efforts for the damaged areas have begun and relief camps are being set up, but are hampered by damage. Proper camp design and management to avoid crowding, which might lead to further health concerns, is imperative. WHO emphasizes reducing suffering of survivors by providing health and psycho-social care. The immediate WHO priority is in deploying personnel to strengthen country efforts. Millions of people are now under serious threat of disease outbreaks as a result of damaged water and sanitation systems, sea water contamination of supplies by seawater and crowded living conditions. Cases of malaria could increase in after flooding due to mosquito breeding if stagnating salty water is turned brackish by heavy rains or fresh water from other sources. [View Article](#)

U.N.: Despite Aid, Tsunami Survivors Face Disease Risk

1 January – Reuters reported that tens of thousands of tsunami survivors are at risk from killer diseases such as [cholera](#). The World Health Organization (WHO) crisis chief David Nabarro, asked whether an earlier warning that some 50,000 people could succumb to disease still stood, said: "It is still too early to make that judgment." Nearly 130,000 people are known to have died when a massive earthquake off Indonesia's Sumatra island sent walls of water crashing onto shorelines as far away as Somalia. But with five million people short of either water, food or basic sanitation across the Indian Ocean, a further toll of 50,000 from disease and other causes would be in line with that seen in earlier humanitarian emergencies, Nabarro said. "At the moment the international operation is incredibly strong...in getting relief to airports. But we still have to be sure we have got the necessary relief reaching people," he said. There were reports of diarrhea, which can be particularly dangerous to children, among those left homeless in India and Sri Lanka, while the situation in Indonesia's Aceh province was still unclear. "We are not alarmed yet, because we expected this...It will be a few more days before we can be confident we have been able to avoid major disease outbreaks," Nabarro told journalists. [View Article](#)

Vietnam Fights Bird Flu Threat as Boy Dies

5 January – Reuters reported that the [bird flu](#) has killed a 9-year-old boy in Vietnam, a health official said, marking the first reported death in 2005 from a virus that killed more than 30 people last year and ravaged the poultry industry as it swept across Asia. The death comes a week after the World Health Organisation warned Vietnam may face new bird flu outbreaks this month, as poultry is transported around the country ahead of the Lunar New Year celebrations in early February. In

response to the threat, Vietnam has culled 4,000 poultry so far this year and officials in Ho Chi Minh City had tightened inspection, state-run Voice of Vietnam radio said. [View Article](#)

Two Vietnamese Boys Die of Bird Flu

6 January – Japan Today reported that [bird flu](#) has killed a 6-year-old boy in Vietnam, the second reported death in 2005 from the virus that killed 20 people in the country last year. The boy, from the Mekong Delta province Dong Thap, died 30 December after developing symptoms of a high fever and coughing, Nguyen Ngoc Diep, director of the General Hospital in Dong Thap, said. On Wednesday, Tran Tinh Hien, deputy director of the Ho Chi Minh City Hospital for Tropical Diseases, said a 9-year-old boy from the southern province Tra Vinh died of bird flu after eating chicken, the first reported death this year from the virus. [View Article](#)

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Doctors Strike, Crippling Haiti Hospital

4 January – Yahoo! News reported that doctors at Haiti's largest public hospital extended a weeklong strike to protest overdue paychecks, leaving dozens of victims of violence and other emergencies struggling to find care. All 75 resident doctors walked off the job last week because the government has not paid their salaries for three months, said Albert Camille Archange, director of the General Hospital in the capital, Port-au-Prince. The doctors, who make about \$145 a month, extended the strike after the government ignored their demands. The hospital's 65 interns were also on strike out of solidarity with the residents. Michael Leandre, a health ministry director, promised the doctors would be paid Wednesday. He blamed the delay on the hospital's failure to provide a list of residents until late December. The strike comes amid sporadic political violence that has killed more than 100 people since Sept. 30, when supporters of ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide stepped up protests to demand his return from exile in South Africa. [View Article](#)

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